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Control and limitation of documentation: implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/206 C

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 51/211 B of 18 December 1996, in which the Assembly reiterated the recommendations on control and limitation of documentation that it had made to intergovernmental bodies in its resolution 50/206 C, and requested intergovernmental bodies to report to it through the Committee on Conferences on measures taken to implement that resolution. Since the adoption of resolution 51/211 B, no initiatives concerning the control and limitation of documentation have been reported by intergovernmental bodies.

2. At the level of the Secretariat, renewed efforts have been made in this field. Seeking to contain total volume, the Secretary-General, as part of the first set of reform measures that he announced on 17 March 1997, decided that, as a rule, all documents produced by the Secretariat should be no longer than 16 pages, a reduction from the former standard of 24 pages. The Secretary-General also indicated that proposals would be presented to intergovernmental bodies in order to secure approval for a reduction in the length of reports produced by those bodies from the standard 32 pages to 20 pages (see A/51/829).

3. The General Assembly, therefore, is invited to consider adopting a decision recommending that its subsidiary bodies should limit the length of their reports to 20 pages. The existing limit of 32 pages was adopted by the Assembly under resolution 36/117 A of 10 December 1981, and reiterated in later resolutions, the latest being resolution 51/211 B.

4. While the year 1996 witnessed a reversal of a long-standing trend towards higher volumes of documentation, current projections indicate that an increase

* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

may well occur during the current year. Therefore, the cooperation of intergovernmental bodies and Member States is essential in containing both the number and the length of the documents that they generate, or that they request from the Secretariat.

5. Also at the level of the Secretariat, action has been taken to reduce the volume of reproduction and distribution of printed material. The number of copies of documents kept in stock has been cut in half, and the circulation of documents within the Secretariat and their distribution in meeting rooms has been substantially curtailed. Permanent Missions at Headquarters have been asked to review their requirements for printed documents, and print runs are being adjusted in accordance with the feedback received. These measures aimed at reducing paper output have in part been possible thanks to a wider access to the optical disk system.

6. A related Secretariat initiative concerns the development of new document formats, based on the use of different type styles and type sizes and of double-column layouts. The formats are being introduced gradually in all languages, taking advantage of the recent acquisition of more powerful text-processing software. The new formats, which are applicable to all six official languages, enhance readability, preserve a consistent look in the documents, are compatible with electronic methods of document processing and storage and produce savings in reproduction, distribution and storage costs because they reduce paper consumption.

7. The trend described in the preceding paragraphs - namely, a decrease perhaps followed by an increase in total documentation volume, on one hand, and a more pronounced and persistent containment of the hard-copy output of the Secretariat, on the other - can be illustrated by the data for Headquarters appearing in the table below, where translation output is used as an indicator of total documentation volume. The data confirm the need for additional measures to be adopted at the intergovernmental level in order to achieve significant progress in the control of documentation.

	Translation output		Reproduction output	
	Thousands of words	Index	Thousands of page impressions	Index
1995	100 780	100	794 601	100
1996	88 864	88	553 065	70
1997 (estimated)	102 528	102	594 195	75

8. Trends in the control and limitation of documentation will be kept under review and, in accordance with paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 51/211 B, in 1998 the Secretary-General will submit to the Assembly, through the Committee on Conferences, updated information on the number and length of documents.